

## THE DEATH OF ARACHNE,

AN HEROICOMI-TRAGIC-POEM.

**T**HE shrinking brooks and russet meads complain'd  
That Summer's tyrant, fervid Sirius, reign'd;  
Full west the sun from heaven descending rode,  
And fix the shadow on the dial show'd.

Philo, tho' young, to musing much inclin'd,  
A shameless sloven, in his gown had din'd,  
From table sneaking with a sheepish face,  
Before the circle was dismiss'd with grace,  
And smoaking now, his desk with books o'erspread,  
Thick clouds of incense roll around his head:

His head, which save a quarter's growth of hair,  
His woollen cap long since scratch'd off, was bare:  
His beard three days had grown, of golden hue,  
Black was his shirt, uncomely to the view;  
Cross-legg'd he sat, and his ungartered hose  
Of each lean limb half hide, and half expose;  
His cheek he lean'd upon his hand; below  
His nut-brown slipper hung upon his toe.

Now with abstracted flight he climbs apace,  
High and more high, through pure unbounded space;      Now

Now mere privation fails the wings of thought,  
 He drops down headlong through the vast of nought;  
 A friendly vapour Mathesis supplies,  
 Born on the surging smoak he joys to rise;  
 Matter thro' modes and qualities pursues,  
 Now caught, entranc'd its naked essence views;  
 Now wakes; the vision fading from his sight  
 Leaves doubts behind, the mists of mental night:  
 Existing not, but possible alone,  
 He deems all substance, and suspects his own;  
 Like wave by wave impell'd, now questions roll—  
 Does soul in ought subsist, or all in soul?  
 Is space, extension, nothing but a name,  
 And mere idea Nature's mighty frame?  
 All power, all forms, to intellect confin'd:  
 Place, agent, subject, instrument combin'd?  
 Is spirit diverse, yet from number free,  
 Conjoin'd by harmony in unity?—  
 Truth's spotless white what piercing eye descries,  
 When the ray broken takes Opinion's dyes!—  
 In vain now Philo seeks the sacred light,  
 In Chaos plung'd, where embryo systems fight.

In this dark hour, unnotic'd, Cloe came,  
 His study-door admits the shining dame;  
 With Nature's charms she join'd the charms of art,  
 Wife of his choice, and mistress of his heart;  
 What on her head she wore, erect and high,  
 Unnam'd above, is call'd on earth a fly;

In wa  
 Her b  
 Studd  
 Th' e  
 Thenc  
 The m  
 This a  
 Inflame  
 With c  
 Roll'd r  
 " How  
 " Imme  
 " Clean  
 " And c  
 " A shir  
 " Three  
 " The b  
 " Holds  
 " Thy fil  
 " Coat, v  
 " Renoun  
 " Where  
 " Come!  
 " Come!  
 As Philo  
 His soul em  
 On the brig  
 Touch'd, a  
 VOL. III.

In wanton ringlets her fair tresses fell,  
 Her breasts beneath transparent muslin swell;  
 Studded with flaming gems a buckle bound  
 Th' embroidered zone her slender waist around;  
 Thence to her feet a vast rotund display'd  
 The mingling colours of the rich brocade;  
 This aiding fancy, blending shame and pride,  
 Inflames with beauties it was meant to hide:  
 With careles ease the Nymph first snapp'd her fan,  
 Roll'd round her radiant eyes, and thus began;  
 " How canst thou, Philo, here delight to fit,  
 " Immers'd in learning, naivness, and wit?  
 " Clean from the chest, where various odours breathe,  
 " And dying roses their last sweets bequeath,  
 " A shirt for thee, by my command, the maid  
 " Three hours ago before the fire display'd;  
 " The barber, waiting to renew thy face,  
 " Holds thy wig powder'd in the paste-board case;  
 " Thy silken breeches, and thy hose of thread,  
 " Coat, waistcoat, all, lie ready on the bed.  
 " Renounce that odious pipe, this filthy cell,  
 " Where silence, dust, and pagan authors dwell:  
 " Come! shall the ladies wait in vain for thee?  
 " Come! taste with us the charms of mirth and tea."

As Philo heard confus'd the silver sound,  
 His soul emerges from the dark profound,  
 On the bright vision full he turn'd his eyes;  
 Touch'd, as he gaz'd, with pleasure and surprize,

VOL. III.

Q

The

The first faint dawns of a smile appear'd,  
And now in act to speak, he strok'd his beard,  
When from a shelf just o'er the fair one's head,  
Down dropt ARACHNE by the viscous thread.  
Back starts the Nymph, with terror and dismay,  
" The Spider ! oh !"—was all that she could say.

At this the Sage resum'd the look severe,  
" Renounce, with woman's folly, woman's fear !"  
He said, and careful to the shelf convey'd  
The hapless rival of the blue-ey'd maid.

Th' enormous deed astonish'd Cloe view'd,  
And rage the crimson on her cheek renew'd.  
" Must then, said she, such hideous vermin crawl  
" Indulg'd, protected, o'er the cobwebb'd wall ?  
" Destroy her quickly—here her life I claim,  
" If not for love or decency, for shame."

" Shame be to guilt, replies the man of thought,  
" To slaves of custom, ne'er by reason taught,  
" Who spare no life that touches not their own,  
" By fear their cruelty restrain'd alone.  
" No blameless insect lives its destin'd hour,  
" Caught in the murdering vortex of their power.  
" For me, the virtues of the mind I learn  
" From sage ARACHNE, for whose life you burn ;  
" From her, when busy all the summer's day  
" She weaves the curious woof that snares her prey,  
" I learn fair industry and art to prize,  
" Admiring Nature providently wife,

" Who,

Who, tho'  
" Not daily  
" ARACHNE  
" Restores wi  
" The thousa  
" And one gre  
" To me her t  
" Taught wha  
" Warm'd by  
" And taught  
" When now  
" She watchfu  
" I learn, whe  
" Hope's plac  
" With care to  
" The golden m  
" Impatient Clo  
" How soon is e  
" Still boasting  
" How blind, a  
" Else how coul  
" Talk thus of  
" Or call aught  
" Exerted only t  
" The blameless  
" For her, the vi  
" Cunning ! whi  
" Is but to her,

Who, tho' her bounty unexhausted flows,  
Not daily bread on idleness bestows,

“ ARACHNE, still superior to despair,

Restores with art what accidents impair,

“ The thousandth time the broken thread renews,

“ And one great end with fortitude pursues ;

“ To me her toil is ne'er renew'd in vain,

“ Taught what the wise by perseverance gain,

“ Warm'd by example to the glorious strife,

“ And taught to conquer in the fight of life.

“ When now with rest amidst her labours crown'd,

“ She watchful, patient, eyes the circle round,

“ I learn, when toil has well deserv'd success,

“ Hope's placid, calm, expectance to possess,

“ With care to watch, with patience still to wait

“ The golden moment, tho' delay'd by Fate.”

Impatient Cloe thus again replied ;

“ How soon is error thro' each veil descried !

“ Still boasting Reason's power, how weak are we !

“ How blind, alas ! to all we would not see !

“ Else how could Philo, in a Spider's cause,

“ Talk thus of mercy with deserv'd applause ?

“ Or call aught virtuous industry and skill,

“ Exerted only to surprize and kill ?

“ The blameless insect, whom no murder feeds,

“ For her, the victim of her cunning, bleeds ;

“ Cunning ! which when to wisdom we compare,

“ Is but to her, to men what monkeys are.”

Q 2

“ Hold !

“ Hold ! Philo cries, and know, the same decree  
“ Gave her the fly, which gives the lamb to thee ;  
“ Or why those wings adapted to the snare,  
“ Why interceptive hangs the net in air ?  
“ As plain in these the precept, “ kill and eat,”  
“ As in thy skill to carve the living treat.”  
To this, she cries, “ Persuade me, if you can,  
“ Man’s lord of all, and all was made for man.”  
“ Vain thought ! the child of ignorance and pride !”  
Disdainful smiling, quickly he replied ;  
“ To man, vain reptile ! tell me of what use  
“ Are all that Afric’s peopled wastes produce ?  
“ The nameless monsters of the swarming seas,  
“ The pigmy nations wasted on the breeze ?  
“ The happy myriads, by his eyes unseen,  
“ That bask in flowers, and quicken all the green ?  
“ Why live these numbers blest in Nature’s state ?  
“ Why lives this spider object of thy hate ?  
“ Why man ? but life in common to possess,  
“ Wide to diffuse the stream of happiness ;  
“ Blest stream ! the o’erflowing of the parent mind,  
“ Great without pride, and without weakness kind.”  
With downcast eyes, and sighs, and modest air,  
Thus in soft sounds replied the wily fair :  
“ This fatal subtilty thy books impart  
“ To baffle truth, when unsustain’d by art ;  
“ For this, when Cloe goes at twelve to bed,  
“ Till three you sit in converse with the dead :

" No wonder then, in vain my skill's employ'd  
 " To prove it best that vermin be destroy'd—  
 " But tho' you proudly triumph o'er my sex,  
 " Joy to confute, and reason but to vex,  
 " Yet, if you lov'd me, to oblige your wife,  
 " What could you less! you'd take a spider's life.  
 " Once to prevent my wishes Philo flew,  
 " But Time that alters all, has alter'd you.  
 " Yet still unchang'd poor Cloe's love remains;  
 " These tears my witness, which your pride disdains;  
 " These tears, at once my witness and relief."

Here paus'd the fair, all eloquent in grief.  
 He, who had often, and alone, o'erturn'd  
 Witlings, and sophists, when his fury burn'd,  
 Now yields to love the fortrefs of his soul:  
 His eyes with vengeance on ARACHNE roll:

" Curs'd wretch, thou poisonous quintessence of ill,  
 " Those precious drops, unpunish'd, shalt thou spill?"  
 He said, and stooping, from his foot he drew,  
 Black as his purpose, what was once a shoe;  
 Now, high in air the fatal heel ascends,  
 Reason's last effort now the stroke suspends;  
 In doubt he stood—when, breath'd from Cloe's breast,  
 A strugling sigh her inward grief exprest.  
 Fir'd by the sound, "Die, forcerefs, die," he cried,  
 And to his arm his utmost strength applied:  
 Crush'd falls the foe, one complicated wound,  
 And the smote self returns a jarring sound.

On Ida's top thus Venus erst prevail'd,  
When all the sapience of Minerva fail'd :  
Thus to like arts a prey, as poets tell,  
By Juno lov'd in vain, great Dido fell.  
And thus for ever Beauty shall controul  
The faint's, the sage's, and the hero's foul.

But Jove with hate beheld th' atrocious deed,  
And Vengeance follows with tremendous speed ;  
In Philo's mind she quench'd the ray that fir'd  
With love of science, and with verse inspir'd,  
Expung'd at once the philosophic theme,  
All sages think, and all that poets dream ;  
Yields him thus chang'd a vassal to the fair,  
And forth she leads him with a victor's air :  
Drest to her wish, he mixes with the gay,  
As much a trifle, and as vain as they ;  
To fix their power, and rivet fast the chain,  
They lead where Pleasure spreads her soft domain ;  
Where, drown'd in music Reason's hoarser call,  
Love smiles triumphant in thy groves, Vaux-hall.